

**Remarks of
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to the
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF STATE
HIGHWAY AND TRANSPORTATION OFFICIALS
HIGHWAY TRANSPORT SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING
THURSDAY, JUNE 10, 2004**

On behalf of President Bush and Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta, I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. I want to congratulate all of you on the job you've done to keep people, goods and services moving and help reduce the number of deaths, injuries and crashes on our nation's roadways.

Collaborating with AASHTO

In February I had the pleasure of welcoming to our headquarters Secretary McDonald and Leo Penne of the AASHTO staff. I believe it was a most productive meeting. We talked about the work of the Subcommittee on Highway Transport and how the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration might become more involved. With help from some of our staff experts at FMCSA, we provided an overview of our activities and discussed our areas of mutual interest.

At that time it became obvious that we both have the opportunity and the interest to collaborate on a number of goals and initiatives. I recognize that to date our agency's involvement with this Subcommittee has been mainly at the executive level. The Federal Highway Administration has had in-depth involvement with your activities for some time. In fact, FHWA Administrator Mary Peters asked me to send her warm regards. And, I'm pleased to see Jim March here from FHWA's Office of Transportation Policy Studies, who I know works closely with you.

I want to take this opportunity to offer our earnest desire at FMCSA to pursue a similar relationship with this Subcommittee so we can collaborate on motor carrier safety issues. Basically, we are following FHWA's lead. We want to partner with FHWA in this collaboration, attending your meetings on a regular basis and working closely with you to improve highway safety at all levels. Today I'd like to begin that effort by bringing you up to speed on some of our work at FMCSA.

Transportation Moving the Economy

It's an exciting time for us right now as we look forward to the landmark reauthorization of the Federal surface transportation program. But getting the economy moving has always been, and remains, a top priority for the President and his entire team. Our nation's economy is strong and getting stronger. More than 1.1 million jobs have been added since last August, and April alone saw the creation of 288,000 new jobs.

We're seeing the economy's impact on commerce as well. The U.S. transportation system annually carries more than 16.3 billion tons of freight — valued at over \$12 trillion. And, as the economy continues to take off, we project freight volume will increase by more than 50 percent in the next 20 years. While this growth is most welcome, it brings with it a potential impact on safety. So we need to prepare.

Safety Goal

Safety is at the very *heart* of our mission at the USDOT and FMCSA. In 2003 we lost more than 43,000 people on our nation's highways. Of that 43,000, nearly 5,000 deaths were related to commercial motor vehicles. We were very encouraged by a steady decrease in truck-related fatalities from 1997 to 2002. However, the preliminary 2003 highway crash statistics showed a slight rise in these fatalities.

It's a sobering reminder of the hard work ahead of us. USDOT has a commitment to reduce the fatality rate in all motor vehicle crashes by 41 percent from 1996 to 2008. To reach this goal, we must take new approaches, find new solutions and develop new technologies that help improve safety and security nationwide. And we must work with our valued partners in the States to reduce highway fatalities.

SAFETEA

USDOT has been working very hard on reauthorization of the Federal highway and transit program. That, of course, includes funding for FMCSA and State-specific initiatives.

The Administration's bill is called SAFETEA. It would more than double funding for highway safety over TEA-21 levels while holding overall spending to a fiscally responsible level. At the end of April, Congress passed a third, short-term extension of TEA-21. It expires at the end of June. A Conference Committee has been created to work out differences between the House- and Senate-passed versions.

At the same time, we at USDOT are still working to secure timely passage of a long-term bill. The new legislation must achieve the fiscal responsibility President Bush is insisting on and incorporate the Administration's priorities, including safety. This is the Department's key legislative priority right now.

Safety Belts

Another high-priority safety objective for the Department is increasing the use of safety belts. In 2003, 58 percent of those killed in passenger vehicles were not wearing safety belts. This underscores the value of the need for states to adopt standard safety belt laws.

We're proud that we have raised the national safety belt usage rate to 79 percent — the highest level ever. However, a recent study by FMCSA showed that only 48 percent of truck and bus drivers buckle up.

So, last December, Secretary Mineta gathered with enforcement and trucking leaders to launch the broadest effort this country has ever seen to get truckers to wear their safety belts. We want you to partner with us in this effort.

And we kicked off the Memorial Day holiday and start of the summer travel season with a \$30 million *Click It or Ticket* campaign. This has been a very successful program. Last year, *Click It or Ticket* resulted in a 4-percent nationwide increase in safety belt use. That's great news because it translates into about 1,000 lives saved. So, it's time for all drivers to buckle up.

NAFTA

I'd like to turn next to issues specific to FMCSA, beginning with the trucking provisions of the North American Free Trade Agreement. While only 4 States in the Southwest share a border with Mexico, NAFTA impacts the whole country. The Bush Administration feels very strongly that NAFTA is vitally important to our nation's commerce and our economy.

You're of course aware by now that on Monday the Supreme Court unanimously ruled in the Administration's favor on the challenge to our environmental review process. This opens the way for USDOT to continue working with Mexican authorities to move forward with long-haul truck and bus operations.

We are committed to ensuring that Mexican-domiciled trucks and buses operating within the U.S. are in compliance with all applicable Federal safety and environmental standards. I realize that many of you are concerned about the fitness of Mexican trucks that eventually will have access to all States. We are prepared with several safety monitoring and application rules for these carriers. These rules will essentially pre-qualify Mexican carriers on safety performance and provide stringent oversight on their compliance.

In addition to these rules, we have been working closely with FWHHA on funding for border operations. And, we want to continue a dialogue with you on Mexican carrier operations within non-border states. Your insights are extremely valuable to this process. We'll be able to address these challenges better if we can work collaboratively on them.

MCSAP

The Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Program, or MCSAP, is the key conduit of Federal funding and grant monies for motor carrier safety enforcement. MCSAP is the foundation for support of our commitment to CMV safety — a commitment that is *unwavering*.

MCSAP has been around for a while — *20 years* — and it will continue to be around. I think it's safe to say that MCSAP is, in a word, an institution. The program started in 1984, when the Federal government committed \$8 million to support the states' enforcement efforts. Funding has increased more than 20-fold since then, yielding major improvements in truck safety.

Over its two-decade life, MCSAP has evolved from an exclusively roadside inspection effort to a comprehensive, results-oriented enforcement program. More to the point, MCSAP has been the backbone of our efforts to standardize rules and inspection procedures. It ensures compatibility among the states, ending the "patchwork quilt" of regulatory schemes. MCSAP grants support...

- roadside driver and vehicle inspections;
- motor carrier compliance reviews;
- traffic and CDL enforcement;
- data improvements; and
- public information and education efforts.

We at FMSCA are proud of this program, and proud of what the States have achieved with it. It is the binding thread of our partnership to reduce CMV-related fatalities, injuries and crashes.

CVISN

The Commercial Vehicle Information Systems and Networks, or CVISN, is the overall technical framework for electronically collecting and exchanging motor carrier safety information and credentials. CVISN streamlines this information for expediting various roadside enforcement operations.

It translates into faster processing of data; consolidation of operations; improved enforcement; improved motor carrier safety; improved compliance; and improved productivity. CVISN allows enforcement personnel to better focus their attention and limited resources on high-risk carriers.

We currently have an excellent implementation status for this program: 38 States are now in deployment; 6 are in design; and the remaining 6 are in planning. We're also working with the Transportation Security Administration to look at components of CVISN already in place that we can tie together with the border operations.

There is a lot of infrastructure that we have already put in place at DOT to speed vehicles along through the system. And we think that the security measures that are being put in place at the borders, as well as the ports, are compatible. We just have to make sure that we build the systems together, not that we have to build them separate where carriers have to choose which way they're going to go.

Future CVISN deployment activities will support USDOT's commitment to reduce crashes and fatalities and improve motor carrier efficiency. Our program objectives include:

- expanding safety and security data integration and exchange activities;
- addressing roadside operations beyond electronic screening;
- supporting electronic processing of additional business-to-government transactions;
- and developing innovative solutions to better utilize limited resources.

A number of key challenges remain for CVISN. We lack dedicated Federal and State funding for CVISN deployment. We need to increase stakeholder participation to complete nationwide deployment — including motor carrier involvement. We must keep pace with evolving technologies and systems requirements. We have an ongoing need for improved data quality and accuracy. We — and many of the stakeholders — must contend with limited staff experience in new technologies, plus staff turnover and changes in political leadership. Complex procurement processes must be better suited to emerging technologies. And, we need to strengthen our public/private partnerships.

To achieve our goals for CVISN, we will continue to strengthen and build on existing State, Federal and industry partnerships. And we will work to encourage private sector investment.

PRISM

The last enforcement initiative I want to tell you about is PRISM — the Performance and Registration Information Systems Management program. PRISM links federal CMV safety information systems with State CMV registration and licensing systems.

This program enables a State to determine the safety fitness of a motor carrier BEFORE issuing vehicle registrations. States may then deny, suspend or revoke the registration of a motor carrier or registrant that has been issued an out-of-service order by the Secretary.

The results of PRISM have far exceeded our expectations in terms of effectiveness, cost and feasibility. The PRISM program offers States a number of benefits:

- **PRISM provides accountability** — it allows you to identify the carrier responsible for the safe operation of each vehicle being registered;
- **PRISM provides a performance-based approach to safety management** — it links carrier, vehicle and driver safety history through the carrier's USDOT number;
- **PRISM provides productivity** — it has created a more accurate process for targeting the highest risk carriers, allowing for better use of scarce resources;
- **PRISM provides better customer service** — it allows your registration agency to issue USDOT numbers, promoting “one stop shopping” to carriers.

Most important, PRISM improves carrier safety. “Warning Letters” have replaced Compliance Reviews for carriers with less severe safety problems. Thirty percent of the carriers that receive these letters improve safety performance on their own.

What's your role in PRISM? First, 32 States are implementing PRISM. Your State should be one of them. If it is not, I encourage your State motor vehicle department to join the program. Second, please encourage your State police personnel to use the most accurate violation code on citations. PRISM works best when registration information is linked to the best, most accurate violation data.

Large Truck Crash Causation Study

I want to tell you about one more area of concern where much of our energy is focused — data. Congress has been paying close attention to this and, consequently, so has the DOT Inspector General.

There's a good reason for this — good data is the key to identifying potentially unsafe carriers and drivers. The more complete and accurate our data is and the more efficient our data systems are, the better our ability to PREVENT crashes and violations. It's like the old medical adage, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Yet the lack of crash data has been a major impediment to developing effective countermeasures.

In 1999, the Motor Carrier Improvement Act that established FMCSA as a separate agency also directed us to study the causes of CMV crashes. So, partnering with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, FMCSA embarked on the Large Truck Crash Causation Study, or LTCC. From 2001 to 2003, we collected data on 1,000 crashes at 24 locations in 17 states. That included 900 data elements per crash, including information on the drivers, vehicles, motor carriers, roadways and the environment.

While the FMCSA and NHTSA reports are not due for public release until this December, I can offer you some preliminary results, based on about a quarter of the total cases. First, both trucks and the vehicles they collide with have significant safety problems that result in crashes. Second, driver error is the most important factor in these crashes, for both truck drivers and drivers of other vehicles.

Driver fatigue may be more of a problem for the drivers of other vehicles, and driving too fast for conditions is another major crash factor for both classes of driver. And, driver distraction may turn out to be the most important crash factor for both classes of driver. Again, the reports are due out in December, and the database will be released to the public early next year.

Data Quality

Data quality is vitally important to so many of our efforts at FMCSA. We've made the improvement of data quality a priority objective. The PRISM program already has gone a long way to improving the accuracy and timeliness of data.

Another initiative that we recently launched is the DataQ's system to expedite the resolution of data challenges. DataQs — the name comes from “data questions” — is an electronic means of filing concerns about Federal and State data that we release to the public. However, we need more active participation from the States in addressing data quality issues. This involves a change in the Commercial Vehicle Safety Plans. The CVSP, of course, is the key to your receiving Federal MCSAP grants.

We know this is a sensitive topic for some of you. Many states do an excellent job of collecting and processing data on crashes and inspections. Others are experiencing some difficulties. This map gives you a sense of where we need to focus our attention **[referring to State Safety Data Quality map, found at <http://ai.fmcsa.dot.gov/SafeStat/staterating.asp>]**.

We are ready to help you with your data issues. This is essential because we're now requiring that your CVSP will show in detail how you will fix your data problems. Addressing data concerns is indeed a high priority. But this effort will afford you an important benefit — 100-percent “high priority” Federal funding.

I realize for many of you this is a formidable challenge. And we know you're not the only ones who collect this information. FHWA and NHTSA also will participate in this process. They, too, recognize that better data quality benefits EVERYONE.

Close

This is just an *overview* of some of the objectives and initiatives we share. Together, we have a number of issues before us that call for clear and straightforward communications. We want to work with you as partners to develop the most effective programs and project our common concerns.

Remember that working together, we can all improve safety, prevent crashes and save lives. Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today.